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Letter dated 5 May 2008 from the Permanent Representative of Djibouti to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

I have the honour to transmit to you herewith a letter from the Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Republic of Djibouti, Mahamoud Ali Youssouf, on the situation between Djibouti and Eritrea (see annex).

I should be grateful if the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Roble **Olhaye**

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Annex to the letter dated 5 May 2008 from the Permanent Representative of Djibouti to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

It is with great dismay and utmost urgency that I bring to your attention and that of the Council a looming crisis at the common border with our northern neighbour, the State of Eritrea. For no ostensible reason or justification, and to our utter bewilderment, we have been witnessing a progressive growth of Eritrean troops at our common border since February 2008 (see enclosure), which included preparation of fortifications and battlements; equipment flow; and well-armed Eritrean soldiers on our side of the promontory of the Ras-Doumeira mountain range overlooking the busy Red Sea shipping lanes.

With maximum restraint on our part, resisting all temptations, and refraining from any forceful reaction, we embarked instead on quiet diplomacy, essentially encompassing direct bilateral contacts at every level, including at the highest. We have sought the advice and intercession of a key Gulf State leader. We have also shared our deep concerns with the diplomatic community in Djibouti; with the AU Peace and Security Council; and with the League of Arab States. Unfortunately, our considerable efforts have failed to elicit any credible response. Of necessity, therefore, Djibouti has had to maintain a state of military preparedness for the possibility of a forceful incursion into our territory by the Eritrean forces.

To no one's surprise though, this matter has a considerable and a familiar ring to it. Eritrea floated a false map in 1996 that incorporated the same northern border area into its territory, thus unilaterally redrawing the established border. Concurrently, there was also an incursion by Eritrean troops into Djibouti territory. Djibouti mounted a forceful protest that resulted in the restoration of the status quo, including withdrawing the validity of the obviously false and contrived map.

Regretfully, tensions surfaced again when our late President and elder statesman of the region, Hassan Gouled Aptidon, was gravely snubbed and insulted in Ouagadougou in 1988 by the Eritrean President. President Aptidon was at that time serving on an OAU high-level delegation of Heads of State and Government, mediating the flare-up of hostilities between Eritrea and Ethiopia. Djibouti's reaction to Eritrea's offensive behaviour was to sever diplomatic relations, which lasted several years before normalization of relations.

In our turbulent and highly volatile region, which has known little peace and stability in the last three decades, we have faced and continue to face an ever-growing variety of challenges — security, political, economic and developmental — that impact on our survival as a nation. Thanks to our very prudent and proactive policies, we have been extremely careful about being a party to any conflict. Our role in all these has always been directed towards lessening misunderstanding and hostilities; enhancing peace, stability and cooperation; and improving the livelihood of our own people and those in the region that have borne the full brunt of the negative consequences of wars.

Djibouti suspects a more immediate motivation behind Eritrea's unwarranted behaviour. The threatened area in Djibouti enjoys a strategic as well as panoramic overview of the critical Red Sea shipping lanes. Given that Djibouti is now rapidly becoming a regional services trans-shipment hub, with the construction of yet

another modern port and a host of infrastructures and projects, Eritrea's sinister actions should be a cause for alarm for the international community.

As present, we sense a real danger of being drawn into an unwarranted confrontation with Eritrea, as both forces are at a heightened alert at the common border. Our peaceful entreaties with Eritrea to remove its troops from the area and to clarify its concerns, if any, have so far fallen on deaf ears.

We consider Eritrea's move a misguided intimidation, and that it constitutes an undisguised and naked provocation against my country's sovereignty and territorial integrity. We are heavily committed to economic development, to the promotion of good neighbourliness; and to nurturing durable peace and stability in the region.

Any deliberate attempts, therefore, by Eritrea to impede our progress and to disrupt our peace and tranquillity cannot be tolerated at all. In other words, conflict has absolutely no place in Djibouti ... unless it is forced upon us.

We call on the Council to deploy urgently all necessary measures towards preventing yet another conflict, under any guise, in a region long ravaged by mayhem, bloodshed and destruction.

I should be grateful if the present letter and its enclosure could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Mahmoud Ali **Youssouf**
Ministry of Foreign Affairs and
the International Cooperation

Enclosure

[Original: French]

Border crisis between Djibouti and Eritrea: Timeline of events

4 February 2008

The Obock regional authorities took note of civil engineering works on the other side of the border, the Eritrean side. When they requested information, the Eritreans replied that a road was being constructed linking Assab to Obock by way of Raheyta.

10 February 2008

Eritrean equipment crossed the border and began operations at Ras-Doumeira.

15 February to 30 March 2008

The Obock regional authorities attempted in vain to make contact with the Governor of the Southern Red Sea region in Eritrea to try to understand what was going on and the purpose of the project at Ras-Doumeira.

7 April 2008

The prefect of the Obock region, accompanied by the head of the Djiboutian army regiment stationed at Obock, decided to go to Ras-Doumeira to look into the situation. The Eritrean army located at Ras-Doumeira turned them back and did not allow them to go up on the mountain.

7 to 17 April 2008

Beginning on 7 April, negotiations were pursued between the two regional authorities in order to understand the reasons for the incursion into Djiboutian territory.

18 April 2008

These negotiations having produced no results, beginning 18 April the Government of Djibouti decided to conduct diplomatic efforts at the highest level. Over the course of five days:

- Message in writing sent to the Eritrean Government through the Ambassador of Djibouti at Asmara.
- Telephone call between the two Heads of State, Sunday 20 April 2008.
- Meeting between the two Ministers for Foreign Affairs on 21 April in Djibouti.
- Meeting between the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Djibouti with the Eritrean Ambassador to Djibouti twice between 17 and 21 April 2008.

22 April 2008

The President of the Republic, heading a ministerial delegation, went to Ras-Doumeira to verify that the Eritrean forces had fully occupied Ras-Doumeira, constructed barracks out of palm leaf, trenches and fortifications in basalt rock; in

the cove next to Ras-Doumeira, fast launches armed with cannons and a patrol boat approached.

The Djiboutian forces were ordered to mount the southern slope of Ras-Doumeira. The Eritrean forces pulled back a few dozen meters towards the other slope.

23 April 2008

Refusal by the Eritrean authorities to receive the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Djibouti, who was carrying a written message from the President of Djibouti addressed to his Eritrean counterpart.

23 April 2008

Diplomatic negotiations continued in Asmara without tangible results:

- The Ambassador of Djibouti to Eritrea met with the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Eritrea twice on 23 April, morning and afternoon.
- He then met with the Director of the Cabinet of the President of Eritrea on Thursday, 24 April 2008.
- A second meeting with the Director took place on Saturday, 26 April.
- The Ambassador of Djibouti in Asmara met with the political adviser to the Eritrean President on Monday, 28 April 2008.
- He then requested an audience with the Head of State of Eritrea, who conveyed a message to him through his information adviser, its substance being that Eritrea was not ready to enter into dialogue with Djibouti.

The Eritrean Government thus categorically refused any diplomatic discussions or meetings.

24 April 2008

A meeting between two high-ranking officers of the two countries' armed forces took place at Ras-Doumeira to discuss the positions of the two armies on Ras-Doumeira. Following this meeting, the Government of Djibouti decided to suspend the complaint it had lodged with the Peace and Security Council to allow more time for bilateral dialogue. Unfortunately, that was the first and last meeting of this type, since the Eritrean officer did not wish to continue the contact, stating that henceforth it was up to the political authorities to settle the border crisis.

The Djiboutian Government waited the four days of the feast of Orthodox Easter, which was observed in Eritrea from 25 to 28 April, out of respect for this religious tradition, and did not take any actions during this period.

30 April 2008

The Government of Djibouti decided to inform the international community.